

UNIVERSIDAD DEL SALVADOR
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFIA Y LETRAS
DOCTORADO EN LENGUAS MODERNAS

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*Contrastive analysis of General British English and General
American sounds. Impact on River Plate Spanish speakers.*



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2011

To my family



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INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that the English language has a global presence, and it is a very important one. English is spoken in most places all over the world when doing business, when technology is discussed or simply when people visit other countries as tourists. Different accents are heard, different “Englishes”. These accents have to do mainly with pronunciation and with who uses the language for the sake of communication. Thus, it would appear unnecessary to compare accents of the same language if they are not an obstacle for communication. However, for those students who will make use of English in a professional way, as interpreters, translators or teachers, it is necessary to provide them with an analysis of its phonological structure, especially if the language will be used as a medium for oral communication.

It is my intention, with this work, to establish a contrastive analysis between the sound system of General British (GB) and the sound system of General American (GA).

This choice, two accents of the same language is not made at random. It is due to the great influence that mass media exert on our students, and why not on our teachers.

These varieties of English are used by broadcasters, professional voices on the network, news and information programmes. The advantage to select these accents is that it is easy to gain access to examples. Besides, phonetic dictionaries as well as books on Phonetics and Phonology are based on these model accents.

On the other hand, GA can be regarded as that form of American English which does not have marked regional characteristics, in this way comparable to GB.

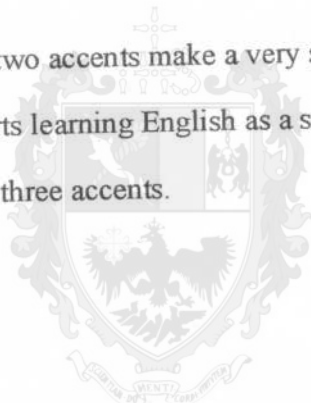
This influence through cable television, films or songs, conveys confusion when students have to use English in oral communication. It is very difficult for students, to realize whether the sounds they produce are American or British, apart from the fact that these

accents have both other different accents according to geographical areas.

Although the value of a contrastive analysis is well known and has been recognized, relatively few substantial studies have been published on this matter. My intention is to fill this vacuum.

The justification for a work like this is the fact that students, in general, face great difficulties learning another language since they master so well their native language, in this case River Plate Spanish, and linguistic transfer are not always correct or adequate. Articulatory differences between GB and GA are not numerous, but they are enough for a contrastive analysis.

Similarities and differences of these two accents make a very special impact on the native River Plate Spanish speaker who starts learning English as a second language. I will analyse this impact and compare the three accents.



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METHODOLOGY

For the contrastive analysis of consonantal sounds I will pay attention to the classification according to manner of articulation, place of articulation, vocal folds position and force of articulation. I will consider the phonological contrasts, the allophones of each phoneme and their distribution.

Vowels and diphthongs will be contrasted in general.

Of all these contrasts I will consider especially those sounds whose articulation, characteristics and distribution are different in the accents to study and on the phonemes that are only existent in one of the accents chosen to be contrasted.

The phonetic symbols used will be those of the International Phonetic Alphabet.



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CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Even though the process of comparing two or more sound systems may appear to be tedious, dry and abstract, the results obtained are of great practical use for students and teachers who might feel misled, confused and sometimes skeptical on which accent they must adopt.

Before comparing sound systems some basic questions about each language must be answered:

- 1) What are the phonemic contrasts?
- 2) What are the allophones of each phoneme and to what environments are the allophones restricted?
- 3) What is the distribution of each phoneme?

That is, in addition to knowing what the phonemes of a language are and what their allophones are, it is important to determine the distribution of each phoneme—that is the positions where it can occur with respect to all other phonemes. This is important since even when the native language has a similar phoneme and the variants are similar, if it does not occur in the same positions, students will have trouble producing and hearing it. It is not only a phoneme that may cause a pronunciation problem, but also sequences of phonemes that might cause difficulty. Both GB and GA have a large number of consonant clusters preceding final pause; on the other hand River Plate Spanish allows very few consonants and no clusters before final pause. This will be a major problem for native River Plate Spanish speakers.

One thing to remember is that when a phoneme in the second language does not exist in the native language, students will tend to substitute for the native phoneme that seems nearest within the whole structure of their native language.

In the case of /θ/, for example, which is non-existent as a phoneme in River plate Spanish,

the nearest phonemes are / f / and sometimes / t /. Thus, the pronunciation of “three” will be either “free” or “tree”. This is a predictable problem.



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